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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000008

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: PRT-WASIT: IRAN PAYS FOR WASIT SHEIKHS' TOUR

REF: A. DIIR-TFM-81-819-08-116

[B](#). BAGHDAD 4146

[C](#). IIR-TFM-81-819-08-114

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Wasit reporting cable.

[1](#)2. (S//REL TO ACGU) Summary: According to numerous tribal and government contacts, from 21 November to 6 December approximately 60 sheikhs and family members visited Iran for fifteen days to tour Tehran, Qom and Mashad. An Iraqi tour company named "Sons of Ruhullah," reportedly sponsored by a partnership between the Da'wa party and Iran, organized the trip. The tour included visits to Shi'a holy sites, shrines to Iranian political/religious leaders, government buildings and the closed US Embassy in Tehran, combined with lectures (ref A). The invitations were made to the sheikhs by Mohammad Reza al Numani, a part-time religious lecturer in Iran, long time member of Da'wa and close associate of both Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki and former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jafari. According to the Wasit IP Chief, Iran will likely sponsor additional trips in order to influence tribal opinion before the next Provincial elections. He said that CF's most effective counter is successful PRT operations, noting that agricultural, business, and other reconstruction assistance will influence the tribal population more than trips to Iran. End summary.

The Tours

[1](#)3. (S//REL TO ACGU) On 18 and 26 December, CDR 214th FB, Team Leader 819th HUMINT Collection Team and PRT-Wasit met separately with two sheikhs who had made the trip to Iran. Both sheikhs have close ties to 214th FB and PRT and had no problem discussing the details of the trip. In the first meeting, Sheikh Mohammad Jorani described a steady flow of lectures urging the sheikhs to join fellow Muslims to fight the Americans in Iraq, encouraging them to send their sons to Iran for education, and emphasizing the need to support Iraqi "federalism" (ref B).

[1](#)4. (S//REL TO ACGU) In the second meeting on 26 December, Sheikh Abd al-Hussein said the tour group of 60 ("20 or so" sheikhs plus their families) moved across the border at the Zurbatiyah Point of Entry, spent a few hours in Mehran, and continued to Tehran for five days, Qom for three days, and Mashad for two days (Note: He reported a three-day train trip from Qom to Mashad. End note). He said a significant amount of the time was spent with Iraqi expatriates, including one, Sheikh Fadl al Maliki, who told them that "Iran is a danger that supports the militias."

[1](#)5. (S//REL TO ACGU) Although Sheikh Abd al-Hussein did not directly answer questions about the messages during the trip, he alluded to other reporting of anti-CF themes by noting that he "was not affected by the trip sponsors' messages, as we know the truth." He said he thought the purpose of the trip was to demonstrate to the Iraqis that "Iran is the

center of Islam" and he claimed he was unimpressed (ref C).

Iran and Da'wa

16. (S//REL TO ACGU) The two sheikhs that made the trip and the eleven sheikhs who didn't attend said they received their invitations by telephone from Mohammed Reza al-Numani. Al Numani was described as the "representative of the Prime Minister in Wasit" by Wasit Police Chief MG Haninn. Al-Numani was a student of Mohammed Baqr al-Sadr when Da'wa was founded in 1957. He spent most of the Saddam era in Iran, has an Iranian wife and is reportedly well-known for a biography he wrote of Mohammed Baqr al-Sadr. He reportedly led a delegation of Wasit sheikhs to visit the Prime Minister in June 2007, and is perceived by the tribal community as Maliki's spokesman. (Note: Numani has met with PRT representatives before but PRT-Wasit was unable to reach him; according to IP Police Chief MG Haninn, he is in Iran. End note.)

Provincial Police Chief

17. (S//REL TO ACGU) On 29 December, MG Haninn confirmed to CDR 214th FB and PRT that Mohammad Reza al-Numani was the primary organizer of the trip. When asked if the visit was intended to benefit the Da'wa party or Iran, Haninn said Iran is increasing its efforts with the tribes due to CF's tribal efforts and the presence of the PRT. When asked what he thought the most effective CF response to the Iranian tribal campaign would be, he recommended continuing the PRT's work, noting that the sheikhs are farmers and are especially interested in agricultural and business development assistance.

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Comment

18. (S//REL TO ACGU) The reaction from our fifteen contacts was generally defensive if they went on the trip and accusatory if they did not. The sheikhs who declined the invitation didn't hesitate to take shots at their "disloyal" colleagues for accepting favors from the "Persians." Since beginning our tribal engagements, every sheikh we've had contact with has prided himself on his pure Arab bloodline and his Iraqi nationalism, as demonstrated by a healthy dose of vitriol for Iran. We take at face value the explanation that most went only to see the holy shrines and visit the country, and we think it unlikely Iran successfully influenced a large number of Wasit sheikhs, a notoriously fickle and self-interested community. Our contacts noted that there have been similar trips in the past and there would undoubtedly be future trips. Regardless of how the sheikhs respond, these efforts illustrate the extent to which Iran deems Wasit Province to be under its sphere of influence.

19. (S//REL TO ACGU) While there is no evidence that PM Maliki had any personal involvement in this trip, the unanimous perception among the sample of tribal and government leaders we talked with is that the trip had his blessing.
CROCKER